

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ISLAMA 00884 01 OF 03 260616Z
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9622

INFO AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMEMBASSY DACCA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 ISLAMABAD 0884

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PK, PINT

SUBJECT: THE OPPOSITION PREPARES FOR ELECTIONS

SUMMARY: THE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE EXHIBITED A SURPRISING DEGREE OF COOPERATION IN AGREEING TO CONTEST THE COMING ELECTIONS UNDER ONE BANNER-THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) - AND ALSO AGREEING ON SINGLE CANDIDATES FOR MOST CONSTITUENCIES. ALL THE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE IN THE PNA EXCEPT THE FORMER JUNIOR PARTNER IN THE PPP GOVERNMENT, THE QAYYUM MUSLIM LEAGUE. THE QML IS NOT SEEN AS A SERIOUS POLITICAL CONTENDER HOWEVER.

A NUMBER OF THESE WHICH THE PNA WILL EMPHASIZE DURING THE CAMPAIGN ARE EMERGING. THEY INCLUDE THE NEED TO RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC AND NON-REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENT, THE NEED TO MAKE PAKISTAN A TRULY "ISLAMIC" STATE, CRITICISM OF BHUTTO AND HIS "AUTHORITARIAN" RULE, THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF PPP INITIATED REFORMS, AND CRITICISM OF INFLATION.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE PNA HARBORS ANY REAL HOPE OF WINNING THE ELECTIONS, BUT ITS LEADERS BELIEVE THERE IS DEEP DISCONTENT AND UNHAPPINESS WITH THE PPP WHICH THEY CAN TAP. CONSEQUENTLY,
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 ISLAMA 00884 01 OF 03 260616Z

FOR THE OPPOSITION, THE ELECTION IS MOST PROBABLY AN INITIAL STAGE IN A CUMULATIVE PROGRAM OF DISCREDITING THE PPP AND CALLING INTO QUESTION THE PRIME MINISTER'S MANDATE AND THE LEGITIMACY OF HIS GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES IN PAKISTAN HAVE SHOWN A SURPRISING DEGREE OF COHESION AND COOPERATION WHILE PREPARING FOR

ELECTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES. NINE OPPOSITION PARTIES AGREED TO COME TOGETHER UNDER THE RUBRIC OF THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) (IN URDU, PAKISTAN QUAMI ITTEHAD) TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS. IN AN UNEXPECTED SHOW OF UNANIMITY THE PARTIES, AFTER CONSIDERABLE WRANGLING, ALSO AGREED UPON SINGLE CANDIDATES TO CARRY THE PNA BANNER IN MOST CONSTITUENCIES AND MANAGED TO FIELD NOMINEES FOR MOST SEATS.

2. THE ONE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY LEFT OUT OF THE PNA IS THE QAYYUM MUSLIM LEAGUE. LED BY THE VENERABLE FRONTIER POLITICIAN, QAYYUM KHAN, THE QML WAS AN INCREASINGLY ENFEEBLED JUNIOR COALITION PARTNER OF THE PPP UNTIL SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WHEN BHUTTO ABRUPTLY DISSOLVED THE PARTNERSHIP FOLLOWING DISAGREEMENT ON DIVISION OF NOMINATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. QAYYUM WAS TAINTED AS HAVING COOPERATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT PARTY FOR FIVE YEARS AND HIS FUTURE FIDELITY TO THE OPPOSITION CAUSE WAS ALSO SUSPECT. AFTER SOME DESULTORY NEGOTIATIONS, THE PNA REFUSED TO LET HIM INTO ITS COALITION. CONSEQUENTLY, THE QML HAS FIELDED ITS OWN CANDIDATES FOR MOST OF THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SEATS IN THE FRONTIER AND SEVERAL SEATS IN THE OTHER THREE PROVINCES AS WELL. KHAN QAYYUM IS CONTESTING FOR THREE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SEATS - PESHAWAR, HAZARA AND SIALKOT - WHILE THE OTHER QML FORMER CENTRAL CABINET MINISTER, YUSUF KHATTAK, IS RUNNING FROM KOHAT AND PESHAWAR. EXCEPT FOR A VERY FEW SEATS IN THE FRONTIER, THE QML IS NOT VIEWED AS A SERIOUS POLITICAL CONTENDER ALTHOUGH IT COULD PLAY A SPOILER ROLE IN TAKING AWAY SOME PNA VOTERS IN SOME CLOSE CONTESTS IN THE FRONTIER. TO A MUCH LESSER EXTENT, THE LACK OF QML SUPPORT MAY ALSO HARM SOME PPP CANDIDATES.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 00884 01 OF 03 260616Z

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ISLAMA 00884 02 OF 03 260528Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 ISLAMABAD 0884

3. PNA CANDIDATES ARE RUNNING FOR EVERY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SEAT IN PUNJAB AND THE FRONTIER AND FOR EVERY PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SEAT, EXCEPT ONE CONSTITUENCY IN PUNJAB, IN THE SAME TWO PROVINCES. ALTHOUGH THE PNA IS BOYCOTTING THE ELECTIONS IN BALUCHISTAN, ON WHAT SEEMS TO US TO BE FALLACIOUS CHARGES THAT MOST OF THE VOTERS HAVE MIGRATED FROM THEIR DISTRICTS, SEVERAL OPPOSITION PARTY MEMBERS ARE RUNNING AS INDEPENDENTS IN THE PROVINCE FOR BOTH ASSEMBLIES. IN THE SIND, THE PNAA DID NOT FIELD CANDIDATES FOR EIGHT OUT OF 43 NA SEATS AND 27 OUT OF 100 PA SEATS.

4. THE OFFICERS OF THE PNA, CHOSEN ON THE BASIS OF ACCEPTABILITY TO ALL PARTIES RATHER THAN COMPETENCE OR CHARISMA, INCLUDE MUFTI MAHMOOD (WHO IS CONTESTING FOR THE NA FROM D.G. KHAN AND D.I. KHAN) OF THE JAMIAT-UL-ULEMA-I-ISLAM, AS PNA LEADER, AND PIR PAGARO, LEADER OF THE PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE, AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PARLIAMENTARY BOARD. WE DO NOT KNOW ON WHAT BASIS THE PARTIES DIVIDED THE TICKETS, BUT ASGHAR KHAN'S TEHRIQ-E-ISTIQLAL WAS GRANTED A SURPRISINGLY LARGE PROPORTION WITH ABOUT 36 PERCENT OF THE PNA STANDARD BEARERS FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COMING FROM THE TEHRIQ AND ITS CLOSE ALLY, THE JAMIAT-I-ULEMA-I-PAKISTAN
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 ISLAMA 00884 02 OF 03 260528Z

RELIGIOUS PARTY. TEHRIQ LEADER ASGHAR KHAN IS CONTESTING FOR NA SEATS FROM KARACHI, PINDI AND PESHAWAR. THE DISCIPLINED AND WELL-ORGANIZED JAMAAT-I-ISLAMI IS FIELDING CANDIDATES UNDER THE PNA BANNER IN ALL PROVINCES EXCEPT BALUCHISTAN WITH PARTY NOTABLE PROFESSOR GHAFOOR RUNNING IN KARACHI AND ISLAMABAD. THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) WAS GIVEN ONLY A FEW PNA NA TICKETS AND IS CONCENTRATING ON PA RACES IN THE FRONTIER AND SIND. PARTY LEADER SHERBAZ MAZHARI IS RUNNING FROM PESHAWAR AND KARACHI. FORMER PUNJAB GOVERNOR AND CHIEF MINISTER GHULAM MUSTAFA KHAR CHOSE NOT TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS AND IS NOT PLAYING AN ACTIVE ROLE AS PML SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT. FORMER PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER HANIF RAMAY IS RUNNING FROM LAHORE ALTHOUGH HE IS STILL IN JAIL.

5. THE OPPOSITION FORMALLY OPENED ITS ELECTION CAMPAIGN WITH A MASS RALLY IN KARACHI ON JANUARY 23 WITH THE LEADERS OF MOST OF THE CONSTITUENT PARTIES
SPEAKING. BASED ON THEIR SPEECHES,

AND DISCUSSIONS EMBASSY AND CONSULATE OFFICERS HAVE HAD WITH OPPOSITION PARTY MEMBERS, A NUMBER OF THEMES ARE EMERGING WHICH THE PNA WILL EMPHASIZE DURING THE CAMPAIGN. THE PNA HAS ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL BE PUBLISHING AN ELECTION MANIFESTO, BUT A FIRM DATE FOR ITS RELEASE HAS NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED.

6. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL THE PARTIES IN THE PNA WILL CAMPAIGN ON BASICALLY THE SAME PLATFORM, ALTHOUGH THE VARIOUS PARTIES MAY CHOOSE TO EMPHASIZE DIFFERENT PLANKS. THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE OPPOSITION'S CAMPAIGN WILL BE THE NEED TO RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC AND NONREPRESSIVE GOVERNMENT AS CALLED FOR IN THE CONSTITUTION. OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE CONTENDING THAT ALL PARTIES SUBSCRIBED TO THE 1973 CONSTITUTION BUT IT HAS BEEN PERVERTED BY AMENDMENTS FORCED THROUGH BY THE PPP GOVERNMENT. THEY CLAIM THAT PAKISTAN HAS MANY OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A POLICE STATE AND THE PEOPLE'S BASIC HUMAN AND CIVIL LIBERTIES ARE BEING DENIED. WE FULLY EXPECT

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 00884 02 OF 03 260528Z

THIS WILL REMAIN THE CENTRAL THEME IN THE PNA'S CAMPAIGN WITH ITS COROLLARY THAT DEMOCRACY CAN BE RESTORED ONLY WITH A PNA GOVERNMENT.

7. A SECOND THEME, AND ONE THAT WILL BE EMPHASIZED BY THE RELIGIOUS PARTIES IN THE PNA, WILL BE THE NEED TO MAKE PAKISTAN A TRULY "ISLAMIC STATE." OPPOSITIONISTS ARE QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT BHUTTO HAS ENGAGED IN "STAGED DRAMATICS" TO PROVE HIS ALLEGIANCE TO ISLAM - INVITING KING KHALID AND LEADING IMAMS TO VISIT PAKISTAN AND SPONSORING RELIGIOUS CONFERENCES - BUT THAT UN-ISLAMIC PRACTICES SUCH AS GAMBLING AND DRINKING ARE STILL COMMON IN PAKISTAN. THE PM HIMSELF WILL BE A CAMPAIGN ISSUE FOR THE PNA WHICH CONTENDS HIS AUTHORITARIAN ROLE IS INIMICAL TO PAKISTAN'S BEST INTERESTS. PNA LEADERS ARE ALSO CRITICIZING BHUTTO FOR HIS ACTIONS IN 1970 AND 71 WHICH THEY CONTEND, BY INNUENDO, LED TO THE BREAK-UP OF PAKISTAN. THE PNA WILL ALSO CONTEND THAT THE WIDELY HERALDED PPP REFORMS HAVE HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON THE PEOPLE OF PAKISTAN AND IN ANY CASE HAVE BEEN MALADMINISTERED. A FURTHER CONTENTION IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY BLOATED AND A GROWING FINANCIAL BURDEN ON THE PEOPLE WITHOUT OFFERING A COMMENSURATE INCREASE IN ITS RESPONSIVENESS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ISLAMA 00884 03 OF 03 261445Z
ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 ISLAMABAD 0884

8. OPPOSITION PARTY SPOKESMEN HAVE ALSO CRITICIZED THE PPP GOVERNMENT FOR ALLOWING INFLATION TO CONTINUE AND WILL CLAIM THAT ANY ECONOMIC GAINS HAVE BEEN EATEN AWAY BY PPP INDUCED PRICE INCREASES. FOREIGN POLICY WILL ALSO PLAY A ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN AND WE EXPECT CRITICISM OF THE PPP AS BEING "SOFT" ON INDIA WILL CONTINUE TO BE HEARD. SO FAR, THE NUCLEAR REPROCESSING ISSUE HAS REMAINED OFF-STAGE AND AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE THE ISSUE OF RELATIONS WITH THE MAJOR POWERS HAS NOT BEEN RAISED BY THE OPPOSITION.

9. THE PNA CARRIES THE BURDEN OF BEING AN ARTIFICIAL COMPINATION OF PARTIES WITH DISPARATE GOALS AND VIEWS. CONSEQUENTLY, ITS CAMPAIGN WILL BE LONG ON RITICISM OF THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT, BUT VERY SHORT ON SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR REMEDYING THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS. WE EXPECT THEIR MANIFESTO WILL ALSO EMPHASIZE THE GENERAL AND AVOID MOST SPECIFICS. ONE OF THE FEW SPECIFIC PROPOSALS MADE - MUFTI MAHMOOD'S PROMISE NOT TO REPAY ANY FOREIGN LOANS "SPENT ON UNPRODUCTIVE WORK" - HAS BEEN USED BY THE PM AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE OPPOSITION'S IRRESPONSIBILITY AND SIMPLEMINDEDNESS. (EVEN HOUGH THE PM MADE AN EVEN MORE EXTRAVAGANT ELECTION PROMISE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 00884 03 OF 03 261445Z

IN 1970 -- NO DEBTS TO BE REPAID -- IN WHAT HE NOW SAYS WAS THE "HEAT OF BATTLE.")

10. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE PNA ENTERS THE ELECTION HARBORING ANY REAL HOPES OF WINNING A MAJORITY OF SEATS IN ANY OF THE ASSEMBLIES. ITS LEADERS DO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS DEEP DISCONTENT NATIONWIDE WITH PPP RULE WHICH THEY HOPE TO TAP. MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE PNA SEES THE ELECTIONS AS AN

INITIAL STAGE IN A CUMULATIVE PROGRAM OF DISCREDITING THE PPP. IN THE VIEW, THE OPPOSITION'S MINIMAL AIM IS TO ENGENDER A WIDESPREAD PUBLIC CONVICTION THAT THE ELECTION HAS BEEN UNFAIRLY CONDUCTED AND THAT THEREFORE BHUTTO'S ELECTION VICTORY REPRESENTS A FRAUDULENT AND FLAWED MANDATE. MORE AMBITIOUSLY, THEY WOULD HOPE TO USE THE ELECTION PROCESS TO SPARK A POPULAR MOVEMENT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT CULMINATING AT SOME POINT AFTER THE VOTING IN THE KIND OF MASS UPHEAVAL WHICH LED TO AYUB'S DOWNFALL IN EARLY 1969.

11. TO ACHIEVE THESE AIMS, THE OPPOSITION SCENARIO WOULD MOST LIKELY CALL FOR ORGANIZING MASS PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS AND PROCESSIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE PNA IN THE EXPECTATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL OVERREACT AND TAKE REPRESSIVE MEASURES AGAINST THE DEMONSTRATORS. THIS WOULD THEN CAUSE FURTHER PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, AND A CHAIN OF ACTIONS AND REACTIONS LEADING TO A BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND ORDER AND BHUTTO'S REMOVAL. SOME MORE TIMOROUS MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION UNDOUBTEDLY DO NOT HOLD THIS VIEW AS STRONGLY AS OTHERS MOST IN THE OPPOSITION WOULD PROBABLY AGREE, HOWEVER, THAT ELECTIONS GIVE THEM AN OPPORTUNITY NOT TO REMOVE THE PPP FROM OFFICE CONSTITUTIONALLY, BUT ARE RATHER A VEHICLE IN A CAMPAIGN TO UNDERMINE THE POWER OF THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT AND PERHAPS EVENTUALLY TO BRING ABOUT ITS DOWNFALL.

12. PNA EFFORTS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN WITH HEAVY STRESS ON THE ALLEGATION, WHICH MAY WELL BE TRUE AND IS IN ANY EVENT WIDELY BELIEVED, THAT THE PNA NOMINEE WHO WAS SELECTED TO RUN AGAINST THE PM FROM LARKANA WAS KIDNAPPED AND KEPT FROM SUBMITTING HIS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 00884 03 OF 03 261445Z

NOMINATION PAPERS. OPPOSITION LEADERS REITERATED THE CHARGE AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN LAHORE, AND DURING THE KARACHI PNA MEETING, THE PUTATIVE NOMINEE WAS BROUGHT TO THE PLATFORM TO AIR IT PERSONALLY.

13. NO MATTER HOW WELL THE OPPOSITION DOES IN THE ELECTIONS, (ASSUMING, AS WE DO, THAT THEY LOSE), THEY WILL CLAIM THE ELECTIONS WERE UNFAIR AND THAT BHUTTO DOES NOT HAVE A LEGITIMATE MANDATE FROM THE PEOPLE. HOW CREDIBLE THIS CLAIM WILL BE DEPENDS ON MANY QUESTIONS, INCLUDING HOW MUCH LATITUDE THE GOVERNMENT GIVES THE OPPOSITION IN CONDUCTING ITS CAMPAIGNS, WHETHER OR NOT THE GOVERNMENT USES WHAT IS PUBLICLY PERCEIVED AS EXCESSIVE AND BLATANT COERCION ON POLLING DAY, AND HOW SUCCESSFUL THE OPPOSITION WILL BE IN FOSTERING POPULAR DISCONTENT WITH THE PPP GOVERNMENT DURING THE CAMPAIGN. OUR INITIAL READING IS THAT THE PM AND HIS PARTY ARE GOING TO UNUSUAL LENGTHS TO MAKE THE NEXT SEVEN WEEKS MUCH MORE OF A TRUE ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAN SOME OF THE PM'S CRITICS ORIGINALLY THOUGHT HE WAS WILLING TO DO. CONSTABLE

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